

8-2007

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Publication Info

Published in *Legacy*, Volume 11, Issue 2, 2007, pages 12-13.

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Shovel Testing Around the Santa Elena Kiln

By Chester DePratter

During the week of July 10, 2007, Jim Legg and I worked around the Spanish pottery kiln at the Santa Elena site on Parris Island. As noted in the last issue of *Legacy* (Vol. 11, No. 1: 6-7), I found that kiln 14 years ago, and we are now in the final stages of excavating in the area surrounding it. On this one week project we were digging shovel tests to determine whether there were kiln-related features beneath what had been the old 7th tee. That former tee was removed (with our approval) by the golf course maintenance staff in January 2007. We were interested in what might be beneath it, because it was adjacent to the Spanish structure that we uncovered in fall, 2006, and it was also the last area around the kiln

that we had not been able to investigate by shovel testing.

Jim and I excavated a total of 29 shovel tests to depths ranging between 1.1 and 3.4 feet (Fig. 1). We were assisted in this work by Kalla DePratter, age 14 (Fig. 2), who proved to be an able field assistant. The contents of these tests allowed us to determine the full extent of the Spanish artifact scatter around the kiln; it now appears that this scatter covers an area measuring 100 X 240 feet (30.5 X 73.1 meters). This was a larger than expected debris field for a kiln that I believe was used only briefly, so I turned to the documents to see if there were descriptions of other activities that might have taken place in the area subsequently occupied by the kiln and the potter.

In a quick check of the records, I found three possibilities for activities that took place outside the town proper (the kiln is located about 250 feet from the west edge of town). The first occurred in 1573 and involved the acting governor of Santa Elena, Juan de la Vandra. While governor, he developed an attraction for a married woman of the town, and in order to facilitate the affair, he sent her husband on a mission to Spain. The Spanish accounts (Connor 1925:87) say "...he left the fort and built a blockhouse near the houses of the settlement, and took the said woman to the said house." Later Vandra cast this woman aside and "went off with a woman neighbor of his." It is possible that Vandra's blockhouse was located on



Fig. 1. Jim Legg (foreground) and Chester DePratter shovel testing beneath old 7th tee. Kiln is to right inside enclosure with brick columns. (SCIAA photo by Kalla DePratter)



Fig. 2. Kalla DePratter standing in completed shovel test. (SCIAA photo by Chester DePratter)

the back side of town where the kiln was built some years later.

Another document (Connor 1925:267) describes the resettlement of Santa Elena in 1577 after a one-year abandonment. Then, Governor, Pedro Menendez Marques, brought a prefabricated fort with him from St. Augustine and erected it within several days of his arrival. To prevent the Indians from approaching too closely, he built seven "outposts" in an arc around the fort spaced 25 to 50 paces apart. Perhaps one of these outposts was located on the kiln site, though there is no extant map to show just where the governor built his outposts.

A third possibility is that there were buildings on the kiln site that related to agricultural activities in the town. Each farmer was supposed to receive about 176 acres of farmland and 10 acres for a garden plot (Hoffman and Lyon 1976:Appendix).

In our shovel testing around the periphery of the town, we found a scatter of Spanish artifacts that extended outward more than 150 yards from the edge of town, and is likely that this scatter relates to the presence of barns, farm sheds, corrals, agricultural fields, and gardens located around the town perimeter (DePratter and South 1995:47-49). The artifact scatter we see around the kiln may, in part, derive from such farming activities. There may be additional possibilities mentioned in the records, and I will continue to explore all options as I prepare the final report.

In the coming months, Jim Legg, Stan South, and I will be producing the final report on the kiln and our more than 200 hundred shovel tests and 5,000 square feet of excavations around it. We look forward to moving on to other parts of the Santa Elena site.

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